

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JERUSA 02221 101141Z

ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

-----026362 101147Z /46

O 101104Z AUG 78

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1516

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JERUSALEM 2221

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

E O 11652: XGDS-1&2

TAGS: PBOR, MARR, MILI, UNSC, IS, LE, XF

SUBJ: ERSKINE/EITAN MEETING AUGUST 9

REF: USUN 3150

1. HERE IS FULL TEXT OF ERSKINE'S REPORT REFERRED TO REFTEL:

QTE 1. ACCOMPANIED BY CQ, AIME AND FARET, I MET WITH EITAN
AND BEN GAL THIS AFTERNOON IN ROSH HANIKRA.

2. THE PURPOSE OF MEETING WAS TO GET CLEAR READING OF ISRAELI
POSITION WITH REGARD TO EVENTUAL DEPLOYMENT OF LEBANESE
ARMY TASK FORCE IN TIBNIN AND TO FIND WAY OUT OF PRESENT IMPASSE.
MEETING LASTED APPROX TWO HOURS. DISCUSSIONS MAY BE SUMMARIZED
AS FOLLOWS:

A. ON OUR PART WE STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE BOTH FOR LEBANESE
GOVERNMENT AND FOR UNIFIL OF ESTABLISHING SOONEST LEBANESE
ARMY PRESENCE IN TIBNIN. WE MENTIONED THAT IF NECESSARY IT
COULD BE A SYMBOLIC PRESENCE TO START WITH. THE COOPERATION
REQUIRED FROM IDF PARTICULARLY IN RESTRAINING DE FACTO FORCES

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WAS EXPLAINED. WE EMPHASIZED CONSEQUENCES WHICH WOULD RESULT
FROM FAILURE OF THIS OPERATION WITH SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR
LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND FOR UNIFIL. WE ALSO EXPRESSED OUR
DEEP AND SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT CONTINUOUS FIRING ON UNIFIL
TROOPS WITHOUT REASON.

B. IDF'S POSITION WAS MADE QUITE CLEAR BY EITAN. FIRST, HE

STATED IT WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION TO HAVE THE BATTALION CONTINUE ITS WAY BY PASSING THROUGH THE CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE REACTION CREATED BY THIS POORLY PLANNED OPERATION, AS WELL AS BY THE COMPOSITION OF THE BATTALION ITSELF BEING PREDOMINANTLY MOSLEM AND THE RECENT INCIDENTS IN THE NORTH, WAS SUCH THAT THIS EVENTUALITY COULD NOT BE CONSIDERED. SECOND, WHILE IDF WAS NOT OPPOSED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LEBANESE ARMY PRESENCE IN TIBNIN THROUGH ANOTHER ROUTE LIKE HASBAYA AND ARKIYA BRIDGE, HE WAS CERTAIN THIS PRESENCE WOULD ALSO PROVOKE STRONG REACTION AND FIRING FROM MILITIAS IN BENT JBAIL AND AIN EBEL UNDER SHIDIAK'S CONTROL. HE INDICATED THAT ATMOSPHERE IN CHRISTIAN ENCLAVES COULD BEST BE DESCRIBED AS HOLY WAR BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS. THERE WAS NO WAY IDF COULD GUARANTEE FULL COOPERATION OF MILITIAS. WHILE THERE MIGHT BE VALID POLITICAL REASONS WHICH HAD COMPELLED GOVERNMENT TO SEND PREDOMINANTLY MOSLEM ARMY TO SOUTH THERE WERE ALSO VALID POLITICAL REASONS WHICH MADE THIS ARMY UNACCEPTABLE TO CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH. IT WOULD BE IN THIS VIEW UNFAIR TO FORCE CHRISTIANS INTO ADOPTING AN ATTITUDE WHEN THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR THEIR SURVIVAL. THERE WAS NO NEED TO TALK ABOUT RESTORATION OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY BECAUSE LEBANON HAS CEASED TO EXIST. FACED WITH THE CHOICE OF EITHER HELPING THE RESTORATION OF SOVEREIGNTY OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH NO LONGER EXISTED AND THE CONTINUATION OF UNIFIL OR OF ENSURING THE SURVIVAL OF CHRISTIANS IN THE ENCLAVES, IDF WOULD NOT HESITATE. IN LIGHT OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS, HE FELT IT WOULD BE ADVISABLE

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FOR GOVERNMENT TO POSTPONE FOR TIME BEING ANY FURTHER MOVE OF THE TASK FORCE. IF THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE TO GOVERNMENT, THE ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE A SYMBOLIC PRESENCE IN TIBNIN WITH ALL THE RISKS INVOLVED. WE SHOULD MENTION HERE THAT UNDER THESE CONDITIONS, IRISH-BATT WOULD FIND ITSELF IN SIMILAR POSITION TO NEPBATT AS A RESULT OF PROXIMITY OF THE TASK FORCE.

3. YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT SIMILAR VIEWS WERE EXPRESSED YESTERDAY BY PARTICIPANTS IN KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE COMMITTEE DEBATE WHERE EITAN HAD TESTIFIED. WE HAVE A FEELING THAT DURING PAST TEN DAYS EITAN AND BEN GAL HAD BEEN ABLE TO RALLY POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THEIR HARD LINE.

4. WE WILL COMMUNICATE IDF'S VIEWS TO KHOURY DURING OUR MEETING SCHEDULED TOMORROW 1530 LOCAL TIME. WE WILL INFORM YOU OF HIS REACTION AND REFER TO YOU FOR CONSIDERATION ANY PROPOSAL WHICH MAY BE PUT FORWARD BY LEBANESE ARMY. UNQTE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TROOP DEPLOYMENT, MEETING REPORTS, INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES, POLITICAL SITUATION, MEETINGS, COMBAT OPERATIONS, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978JERUSA02221
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DC IS ALSO X1
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P850033-0294
Format: TEL
From: JERUSALEM
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780879/aaaacnuo.tel
Line Count: 112
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 46d25b65-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS, EXDIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS, EXDIS
Reference: 78 USUN NEW YORK 3150
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1781008
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ERSKINE/EITAN MEETING AUGUST 9
TAGS: MARR, MILI, XF, IS, LE, UNIFIL, IDF, (EITAN, RAFAEL), (GAL, BEN), (ERSKINE, EMMANUEAL A)
To: STATE TEL AVIV MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/46d25b65-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014